

Leave a light on(when you go) by ZJpotter

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Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven & Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers & Eleven, Jonathan Byers & Nancy Wheeler, Will Byers & Eleven & Dustin Henderson & Lucas Sinclair & Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

"We're going to play Monopoly, but we have to be really quiet so we don't wake anyone up. Do you wanna play?"

"Yes," she said and allowed Mike to lead her out of the blankets.

Eleven learns she doesn't have to deal with nightmares alone. Post-S1 if S2 never happened.

Leave a light on(when you go)

Author's Note:

I thought of this idea while before I watched season 2 so here we have your canon-divergence. El vanishes, but is found shortly after. She sort of floats around households for a while.

I hope you enjoy reading!

"El"

"El"

"EL"

Eleven's eyes shot open, her breaths coming out in short, hungry puffs as if the air was cold and limited. She half-expected to be met with the terrifying mouth of the Demogorgon, or the rough face of Papa. His hands gripping the sides of her arm, one hand going up to brush her hair and cup the side of her face. Papa saying "It's okay Eleven, I'm going to make it all better, I just need you to do one more thing."

Instead, it was Mike who hovered above her, eyes red and filled with concern.

"El, are you okay?"

She looked past him. Dustin was looking at her, but quickly ducked his head when he saw she was looking back. Lucas had his hands clamped over his ears, not unlike how he did that night in the school classroom.

When there was nothing. Nothing but flickering lights and bad men and Mike staring back at her, eyes filled with tears.

Mike.

Mike, who promised a warm bed and food and the Snow Ball.

Mike, who she left behind.

She was brought back by a squeeze to her hand. She realized she never answered the question.

"Yes."

It must have not been the answer he wanted, because he opened his mouth to say something.

"Is El okay now?"

Eleven poked her head out of the blanket fort Mike kept up for her. Will was peeking out of the bathroom, three shades paler than usual. (In retrospect she didn't really know what typical Will color was.)

"She's okay," Mike said and turned back to Eleven, "I-we were worried about you."

"Worried?"

"Yeah, worried," Mike said because he always explained things to her. "Like when there's something wrong and you feelweird about it."

He gently tapped a finger right on her stomach, "In here."

That earned a small giggle from El. Mike gave her a small smile.

"Hey Mike, I found it!" Dustin said.

"Will you shut up? We're supposed to be sleep!" Lucas whisper-yelled.

"You shut up!"

"We're going to play Monopoly, but we have to be really quiet so we don't wake anyone up. Do you wanna play?" Mike said to her.

It was at that moment she understood. Why Mike's eyes were so red. Why Will looked so pale.

She was no stranger to nightmares. No stranger to the loneliness they gave her when it was over. The feeling of being scared that crawled through your arms and legs and up your throat. So she knew the

feeling, she knew the look. The look of red eyes and pale skin and lost sleep clinging to your eye-lids.

She did not know the feeling of facing them together.

"Yes," she said and allowed Mike to lead her out of the blankets.

Will, Lucas, and Dustin were already setting up. There were tiny pieces and a big board with squares going all around it.

"Okay so El's never played before," Mike said sitting down on the floor.

"You're going to love it," Will smiled.

"Someone get the instructions," Dustin said already claiming his piece.

"We don't need any instructions," Lucas said.

"Uh yeah we do, how else is El going to learn?"

"We could just tell her."

Eleven sat down in the circle of boys, her friends. She picked up one of the pieces, brushing her fingers over the cool surface. She smiled. They played until the sun started to come up.

Nancy sighed fiddling with the hem of her shirt. She lay on the bed, five layers of covers tucked around her. Despite the temperature in the room, she was cold. Still so cold under five layers. The coldness clung to her skin, around her like a cloud.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Nancy turned her head. Johnathan was on his side, facing her. Her mom had told him he was more than welcome to sleep on the couch, but Nancy said that it was nonsense. She liked it better when he was

with her. She wanted someone near.

"Do you?" She asked.

Johnathan shrugged, "My mom said it helps sometimes."

"I don't know, it's just hard you know? Like it won't leave me alone. That place. The....Upside Down? Is that it?"

Johnathan nodded.

"And then-then I remembered-"

"Barb."

It was a quiet whisper, but it was enough to make Nancy bolt upright. Her heart beat against her rib cage and she willed it to calm down.

In the doorway was Eleven, drowning in a pair of Nancy's pajamas, looking like a deer in headlights.

Nancy gave a small, confused smile, "Hey El. Why-why are you up here?"

Mike and Will had slept downstairs rather than Mike's room. It was closer to Eleven that way, Mike had said. So why would Eleven leave her friends?

"Can't sleep," the girl said fidgeting in the dark hallway.

"Come," she nodded her head towards the room.

It took a moment, but Eleven made her way onto the carpeted floor of Nancy's bedroom.

"Johnathan, move over," Nancy said, "Please."

Johnathan moved over creating space between her body and his. Nancy patted the new space, hoping Eleven would get the idea.

It was something she used to do with her parents. When her dreams turned sour she would climb in between her parents and let them

chase her bad dreams away. Mike did the same, sometimes choosing to nestle under her covers. Holly's dreams were always good. Nancy hoped it would always stay that way.

Eleven slowly, crawled on the bed and lay in the spot.

"You can stay with us tonight, okay?" Nancy said, "How does that sound?"

Eleven looked up at her wide eyed, "Okay."

Sometimes Nancy forgot how small the girl was. She was filled with immense power and had been through more than Nancy could imagine. At the end of the day, she was only twelve-maybe twelve-. Twelve, and thin and tiny. Nancy couldn't help but want to protect her.

"I'm sorry," came Eleven's voice, "About Barbara."

Nancy looked down, mouth trying to work its way into saying something.

Eleven was already halfway asleep by the time Nancy thought of words to say.

Nancy brushed a hand through Eleven's growing hair.

"Lights on or off?" Johnathan asked when Eleven's breathing had fully evened out.

"On."

Johnathan shifted one of the covers so it covered Eleven.

"Goodnight Nancy."

"Goodnight."

There was a pause and they both whispered "Goodnight Eleven" into the room.

Jim Hopper opened his eyes, adjusting to the darkness of the room. He could make out wood pieces scattered across the floor, and open boxes of Christmas lights with the lights flowing out of them. There were tools spread out on the table along with tapes and records. It all came back to him.

Will's favorite songs and wood panels to fix the hole in the wall (Lonnie's job was temporary at best.) There was talk about a new carpet because there were scorch marks and the lingering smell of oil and decay (Johnathan had a hard time explaining that one). He remembered the shutter of Johnathan's new camera and how Joyce had gotten elbow deep in paint. And how her face scrunched up when he had returned with new wallpaper to cover the big black letters on the wall. Somewhere along the way, when a break was in order, she had sunk beside him on the couch laughing into her mug of hot chocolate. They talked and talked and talked the moon into the sky, barely noticing how Will and El had somehow managed their way into the chair, fast asleep against each other.

Yeah it had been a good night.

Somehow something still felt off. Maybe it was the chief in him, always moderately alert. Hawkins wasn't a quiet town anymore. There were secrets, locked up and tucked away and somehow it had become his job to keep it that way. Or maybe it was the fact that they had survived whatever that craziness was and nothing was happening anymore. It was like he expected something else to follow.

He found himself standing outside Joyce's room. The door was left slightly open. Joyce was faced away from him, but he could make out Will's body tucked under her arms. They were both sleeping soundly, not bothered by the new sleeping arrangements for the night.

Jim stepped away from the door and back into the darkened hallway. Jonathan's door was closed, but who knew if the older boy was actually sleep or not. Will's door was left partially open. Inside the room was Eleven, who had to be picked up and placed on the bed since she was far too sleep to do anything, but flop over. Joyce had gotten her changed into one of her old shirts, shimmying the large sewn together fabric over her head. Jim had worked on getting Eleven under the covers. The girl had slept the whole time.

There was a sharp thud. Jim sighed, waiting for something, something to burst out of the wall. Nothing did. There was another noise. He slipped inside Will's room to find Eleven sitting straight up on the bed, trying to suck in as much air as her lungs would allow her. In the darkness he could make out blood peeking out from her nose.

For a moment she just looked around the room, taking it all in. He could see her train of thought- This is real. It's not a nightmare. I'm in Will's room.

She locked her scared eyes on him.

He held his hands up in surrender, "Everything okay, kid?"

She hesitated before pulling her knees to her chest and nodding.

"Just making sure," he said stepping further in the room.

Eleven's gaze had turned to steel, her eyes a dangerous warning. He never thought he'd be on the receiving end of one of those.

Jim took a closer step to the bed and Eleven moved over just slightly.

Jim found that to understand Eleven, words weren't enough. She didn't talk much, which was hard at times when you wanted to know what she wanted. She said everything with her actions and her looks. An intense glare was a warning, wide, soft eyes meant afraid, and a tiny smile meant she was happy or at the very least content.

He was still learning the language of Eleven and this seemed to be the biggest test of them all.

He bent down to pick up the blankets she must've kicked off during the time she was sleep. He placed them on the foot of the bed.

"You're okay kid," he said, "You're safe. Understand?"

Eleven just stared at him.

Jim sighed, placing his hands on his hips. The situation was way too similar to his little girl. She would not go to sleep when she got her

own room. It was too large; too many monsters could be hiding. She wouldn't sleep. Not until he checked.

Jim walked over to the closet, "I don't see anybody."

Eleven stared at him, eyes softening into confusion.

He made his way to the door, poking his head out into the hall. It was still dark and empty.

"Nothing, here. Just Johnathan's room and Joyce's room. Nobody but us. "

Suddenly he heard a tiny patter and Eleven was standing right beside him, peering into the hallway. Jim moved away from the door, tracing his hands along the wall covered in Will's drawings, walking as he did so.

"No Upside Down, it's real. All of it."

He heard a noise behind him; must be Eleven's hand along the wall. He checked under the bed and deemed it safe and checked a few other corners before opening Will's window and sticking his head out.

There was just the cold night air and the woods. It was foggy and you couldn't see much, but there was no toxic air to breathe in or little white specks falling like snow. It was just Hawkins.

Eleven looked at him, hands resting on the windowsill.

"You're safe, kid. Nothing's going to hurt you."

"Safe," she repeated in that small voice of hers.

"Yeah, safe."

"Hawkins."

Jim nodded.

"No bad men."

Jim nodded again, this time a frown accompanying it. He didn't like those lab people. He didn't like that Joyce, that Will, that a little girl had nightmares because of them.

"No Papa."

Jim had to look away from her then, to not face her with the sudden anger that bubbled in his chest, "No Papa."

Eleven nodded and let out a sigh of her own. She went back over to Will's bed climbing on top and wrapping her self tightly in the blankets.

"Try and get some sleep."

As expected, Eleven said nothing. Jim walked away from the window and back across the floor to the door.

"Stay?"

He turned around, to see her eyes on him. One hand patted the space next to her. He found it incredibly hard to say no.

He took the empty space and Eleven rolled over on her side, curling up in the blankets.

"Good-night," she said.

"Night," he said absentmindedly rubbing a hand up and down her arm.

She didn't seem to mind.

He had work in a couple of hours. That was Jim's only thought as his feet hung off the edge of Will's bed. It was immediately disregarded when he felt Eleven's small body turn towards his, nearly nuzzling into his side. Work could wait, he said as sleep pulled at his eyelids.

The night had been good. Well, it would all be better in the morning.